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Larson Pushing Education Technology Plan; Says Provisions May Be Enacted Through Executive Action

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Mar. 23, 2000 - In an interview with the White House Bulletin, freshman Congressman John B. Larson (D-CT) said that while one the three education bills he introduced in his "Technological Marshall Plan for America," has already passed the House and awaits Senate action, provisions of all three may be enacted without legislative action through the coordinated efforts of several Executive departments.

Larson's bills are the "National Youth Technology Corps Act," which would use volunteers to recruit and organize youth to implement and maintain computer systems for public schools community centers, public senior centers, and libraries; the "Technologically Trained Teachers Act," aimed at training teachers in the use of modern classroom technologies; and the "Science and Educational Networking Act.," the purpose of which is to develop a strategic plan for the creation of a national technological infrastructure to connect public schools and libraries to the information superhighway. The networking bill has already passed the House and is awaiting action in the Senate.

Asked to assess the bill's prospects for House and Senate passage, Larson said, "I just talked with some of our colleagues in the caucus," and "there's a feeling that we may end up in the same situation as last year," with "perhaps just one piece of education legislation being thrown in the Omnibus Bill negotiated between President Clinton and Congress. Obviously that's not the best way to devise an education strategy." Added Larson, "We need a universal, ubiquitous approach" to education technology issues. Currently, "we're doing it on a hodge-podge, piecemeal basis. You couldn't put together a system of interstate commerce," or an "interstate highway system" in this "increment fashion. This is the same thing. This is an information highway."

Accordingly, "there is a developing focus on what we can do in terms of the Administration. We'd like to bring together and see happen, hopefully in a bipartisan fashion, the various things we can do with the Administration without passing legislation. Ultimately, the objective is to coordinate a national strategic plan with the Departments of Labor, Commerce and Education." There are "well-intended programs in place" in those Departments seeking to bring about "our goals incrementally. That only exacerbates the problem, helping those with access to the new technologies do even better and leaving many behind." Asked to evaluate the chances of executive action on this matter, Larson said, "We are talking as we speak."

Larson emphasized that education technology issues are not only key to the education of our children," but also to the "defense of the nation" and "our prosperity." Said Larson, "Education is inextricably linked to our future. How do we make

sure that we're able to fill the 600,000 jobs that are vacant in the high tech-area? . How do we prepare for the most sophisticated military in history? . How do we help ensure our prosperity?" Moreover, the purpose of the bills is to "turn technology to a civic purpose, where it can help the entire community, where we can help people teach people how to e-mail their sons, daughters, grandchildren. We need to stimulate technology's civic side," while making sure "we close the digital divide, which is getting worse by the day," and "leave nobody behind in this new economy."

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